

Executive Summary of all Comments

MetroAccess is a curb-to-curb paratransit service operated by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) for citizens who, due to disability, are unable to complete their desired trip using regular fixed route service. Riders must schedule a trip at least 24 hours in advance, and riders are given an arrival time within a 30 minute window. All riders must be certified to use the service based on medical information presented to WMATA, in general, every three years. Fairfax County contributes funding to this service.

MetroAccess received the greatest number of complaints (140) and three compliments. (Note: The concerns reflected experiences with the previous MetroAccess contractor, LogistiCare. The current contractor, MV Transportation, took control of MetroAccess two months after these public forums.) Lack of reliability was mentioned the most (46 times), including specific complaints about late arrivals and no-shows. Complaints about operator and staff behavior (36 complaints), included comments about rude dispatchers and drivers; drivers who do not know the area; dispatchers who gave wrong information; drivers who are not fluent in English; the lack of the promised Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) capability that would inform the dispatcher of the location and estimated time of arrival of a late-arriving vehicle; and drivers not giving verbal guidance to blind/vision impaired riders about how to get to and from the vehicle. Scheduling difficulties (16) ranked third, and safety/maintenance issues (11) ranked fourth among the concerns raised. Problems with the eligibility process and convenience (6) were reported, as was vehicle design (4). Several citizens mentioned difficulty in identifying the vehicle assigned for their trip when it arrived to pick them up; this situation is created because several subcontractors provide MetroAccess trips, and often the rider is not notified which company received the pick-up order. There was a general sentiment expressed at the forums that MetroAccess lacks monitoring and does not respond to complaints.

A number of recommendations (17) were made to improve MetroAccess. The most frequent recommendation (5) was to implement same-day service. (Currently, service requests are required to be made 24 hours in advance of the trip.) In addition, speakers recommended the following:

- Implement a robust service monitoring process focused on the quality of service.
- Implement a more direct complaint process so that MetroAccess receives and resolves the complaint. (The new contract calls for all complaints to be tracked by WMATA, rather than the contractor.)
- Improve staff courtesy toward riders. Some speakers requested the following: MetroAccess staff be required to call clients when vehicles were running late; equipping vehicles with current maps; implementing a better process of

- communicating directions to operators; having an administrator “who cares;” and making customer service #1.
- Other recommendations included replicating Arlington County’s STAR program; expanding service into Prince William County; providing an adequate communications system for riders who are deaf or blind; and, expanding assisted transportation for seniors.

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is a fixed route bus service funded by Fairfax County and operated out of Fairfax County Department of Transportation.

The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR received a number of complaints (55). The greatest number (13) concerned operator behavior - drivers who are rude, not stopping at a requested stop, and not calling out stops. Issues about bus stops and shelters received the second highest number of complaints (12). Specifically, comments were made about stops not being located near intersections or crosswalks; the lack of shelters; stops that are poorly maintained; stops that lack accessible pathways; poor access from the stops to local businesses; and, stops that are poorly lighted and without benches. Citizens also cited problems with bus schedules and lack of service (14), including buses arriving late or not at all; lack of mid-day and/or weekend service in some areas; and, lack of service to some areas of the County. Wheelchair users cited broken lifts on some buses.

A number of recommendations (19) were made to improve FAIRFAX CONNECTOR:

- Improve the routes: requests for additional transit service; implement flex-routing; provide feeder bus connections from subdivisions; increase holiday and Sunday service; and, coordinate services with Loudoun transit.
- Improve shelters: place shelters closer to stop lights and cross walk intersections; and, enhance bus stops with lighting and benches.
- Improve rider information: display route numbers on bus stop signs which highlight the bus routes that serve the stop; provide on-board automated voice annunciators and visual displays for stops, so that riders know what stop is coming next; and, make more public announcements about weather related rerouting.
- Improve customer service: provide drivers with current maps and a way to get directions; and, train drivers to assist people who are visually impaired and be more sensitive to the needs of these riders.
- Monitor bus operations for ADA compliance.
- Increase ridership: provide a free-ride day to encourage new riders.

Metrobus is the fixed route bus system serving the Metropolitan Washington area. Fairfax County contributes funding to this service.

Metrobus received a number of complaints (30). Scheduling problems (12), including limited and/or lack of service to specific areas as well as difficult to read route maps and timetables were frequently noted. Operator and staff behavior complaints (6) including drivers who: are hostile and do not know how to use wheelchair lifts; take buses on the road with broken lifts; do not properly curb or kneel the bus; do not call out stops; and, who do not know how to deal with persons with a speech impairment. Rude behavior from central office personnel was also noted. Bus stop and shelter complaints (5), including lack of benches, shelters without platforms, the need for snow removal from shelters, and the placement of shelters and stops were listed. Other complaints included difficulty in obtaining ID's for seniors and people with disabilities, high fares, crowded buses, and a system that is too complex to navigate for many consumers.

A number of recommendations (13) were made to improve Metrobus:

- Several were route-specific requests for additional or alternate service.
- Improve the eligibility process: people with permanent disabilities requested a permanent reduced fare ID rather than one that must be renewed, in general, every three years; in addition, a request was made to issue these ID's at a location in Fairfax County to avoid a trip to Washington, DC.
- Improve rider information: install tactile signage on fare-boxes for people who are blind.
- Increase ridership: a request was made to implement a free-ride day.

FASTRAN, operated out of the Department of Community and Recreation Services, is the County's human services transportation system. In addition to transporting people to County funded programs, it provides a mid-day, Dial-a-Ride program for low-income residents to medical and social service appointments, as well as shopping trips. Fairfax County funds this service.

FASTRAN received a number of complaints (25). The greatest numbers were about unserved and underserved areas, policies, and limited capacity (8). Attendees noted that FASTRAN can't be used for general work trips, has strict service zones which affect job placement options, and policies that do not allow it to be used for transportation to some appointments. Complaints also included: the slow and stringent eligibility requirements of the application process; problems with scheduling trips in advance; late pick-ups; lack of response to complaints; lack of sensitivity of operators, and rudeness of reservationists.

A number of recommendations (7) were made to improve FASTRAN:

- Improved scheduling: more same day service; and, improve scheduling of proper bus for wheelchair users.
- Increase consumer input in planning: involve parents and consumers in decision making and planning; and, to work more closely with specific programs.
- Improve financial support: raise fees and provide scholarships.

Metrorail, the metropolitan region's rail service, received a number of complaints (22), with accessibility issues being the most reported (10), including the gap between a train and a platform (threshold), low lighting on platforms and by turnstile and fare machines, stations without captioning, obstacles for the blind, and announcements which are difficult to understand. Comments were received about the new Metro plan to remove seating, and the concern was expressed that it will be difficult for those customers who are not able to stand. Some participants commented on the fact that elevators and escalators don't always work, and that elevators are often dark and located in out-of-the-way places. Customer service comments included a lack of responsiveness to complaints, lack of information from station managers, and a lack of bathroom facilities. Comments were received about the placement of parking for people with disabilities at the Vienna Metro station, and about the insufficient number of spaces at Van Dorn Metro. Finally, there were comments about fares being too high.

A number of recommendations (22) were made to improve Metrorail:

- Improve maintenance and safety: improve the maintenance of elevators and escalators; improve lighting in elevators.
- Improve customer information: provide more tactile signage; clearly announce stops.
- Increase monitoring: use an outside group to monitor WMATA compliance with ADA laws.

Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation is a program which provides Medicaid funded transportation to Medicaid-certified residents to medical appointments and approved day support programs. Rides must be scheduled one business day in advance. LogistiCare provides this service, under contract to the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services.

Medicaid Transportation received a number of complaints (19). Reliability (6) was reported as a problem, including late pick-ups and being stranded at an appointment when the driver does not show up for the return trip. Operator and staff behavior was

mentioned (2), including drivers who are not sensitive to rider limitations due to cognitive disabilities, drivers arriving early for a scheduled appointment and demanding that the rider be ready, and dropping riders off without ensuring their safety. Regular riders and caregivers complained that drivers and companies change frequently and without notice; that there is difficulty communicating with drivers; and, that there is a lack of vehicle attendants for riders who need extra supervision.

A number of recommendations (4) were made to improve Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation:

- Improve customer service: provide sensitivity training for front-line staff.
- Improve accountability: implement a common check-sheet form for drivers to note injuries to clients; create program accountability for poor service.
- Improve scheduling: ensure that driving staff do not attempt to pick up riders on Community Services Board (CSB) contractor in-service training days.

Pedestrian issues in Fairfax County are addressed by the Department of Transportation Pedestrian Program Manager. (Pedestrian issues are also addressed in a recent report by the Pedestrian Task Force.)

Pedestrian issues were the topic of a number of complaints (15). They included, but were not limited to the following: the lack of sidewalks; no warning that the sidewalk ends; sidewalks and curb cuts not built to code; sidewalks that do not connect to each other; shrubs blocking sidewalks; lack of safe pedestrian access to stores; and, generally poor maintenance. There was a consensus opinion that many roadways in the County are too dangerous for pedestrians to cross.

Taxicab service in Fairfax County is monitored by the Department of Cable Communication and Consumer Protection (DCCCP). The FCDOT also operates a discount taxicab-voucher program called Seniors-on-the-Go! (SOTG).

Taxicab service received complaints including drivers acting hostile toward clients with guide dogs, difficulties in scheduling the lift-equipped vehicles, and slow response times.

Recommendations included establishing an SOTG type program for persons with disabilities and increasing the number of lift-equipped taxicabs.

Multi-modal, Multi-jurisdictional Transportation Recommendations

While many complaints/comments were mode-specific, many residents expressed

concerns that applied universally, across all modes, regardless of jurisdiction or disability. Following is a compilation of those comments, separated into four categories: Regional Coordination; Sensitivity Awareness; Service Monitoring; and, Miscellaneous.

Regional Coordination (14)

Fourteen citizens commented on the need for more regionally based programs. Specifically, participants commented about the difficulty of getting information about a specific service that addresses their transportation needs. While there are many transportation options, there is not a location where information about all the available services can be found. The following were specifically recommended:

- One-Stop-Shop - Implement a One-Stop-Shop for consumer information. This shop would provide transportation information for all regional transportation options, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. This would include an on-line database for comments/complaints for all public transportation services. In a robust application, this One-Stop-Shop could: allow for centralized dispatch services for all providers to encourage shared-ride opportunities; facilitate volunteer transportation services; and, broker taxicab rides for non-English speaking residents by using language line.
- Coordinated/Comprehensive Transportation Planning - Coordinate transportation planning and expanding the scope of transportation planning to include the coordination of all travel access linkages from your trip origin to your destination. This comprehensive approach includes the following, with the goal of providing a seamless transportation linkage: sidewalks and trails, curb cuts, cross walks, pathways from curb stop, bus stops shelters, signage, routes, route deviations, alternative transportation, and access to all public transportation modes.
- Community Involvement - Revise the County's transportation plan to include issues raised in these public forums, and have quarterly focus group sessions made up of users, drivers, providers, and programs to improve real-world transportation coordination; use complaint information to guide improvements

Sensitivity Awareness (4)

- Adopt the national Easter Seals-Project Action training programs and materials for all operators.
- Implement operator standards of conduct and training.
- Improve route and customer service training for dispatchers.
- Enforce the requirement that drivers do pre-trip testing of lifts.

Service Monitoring (3)

- Transportation Planners should ride the systems.

- Designate one County employee to receive, document, and address complaints.
- Use technology to track location of buses, vans, and taxicabs to ensure on-time pick-up.

Miscellaneous Recommendations (12)

- Include sliding fares for transportation based on income.
- Develop more accessible/walkable communities.
- Standardize and install accessible traffic signals.
- Install benches and lighting at bus stops.
- Locate affordable housing near bus stops.
- Consider the needs of seniors when planning transportation services.
- Create a public relations campaign to educate the public, including those who ride public transportation, about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and courtesy to people with disabilities.
- Provide a dedicated funding source for all transportation services.